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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #0231

08/04/00

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

I can't remember when I've had a vacation and the weather was downright awful! Two weeks, and most every day was rainy at some point. Today, Friday, is the first time I've seen the sun for more than five minutes! Today was the first time that I could get out in the yard and do some work. Well, that's almost true - yesterday I foolishly went out under the threat of rain and mowed part of my lawn. Mowing damp grass - high damp grass - is not fun! But, today I enjoyed. The sun felt terrific; it's unfortunate that this vacation is winding down. I did get a lot of reading done, which was enjoyable. It's a good thing I have another week coming at the end of the month. The weather had better be nicer than these past couple of weeks!

With the return of the sun, a good thing is that I will be seeing a number of my old user group friends this weekend at a barbecue that I'm hosting. Some of the members of what used to be the South Shore Atari Group (SSAG) will be dropping by for the day. It will be good to see these guys again, some of whom I haven't seen for perhaps 6-7 years. A few of them still get together once a month at a local pizza shop and just sit around and talk shop. Most have gone over to the peecee side of things, but Atari's name does come up on occasion! It should be a fun day and I'm looking forward to it.

And then it's back to work! It's not going to be a happy return as I just learned that my current boss resigned a few days ago. If you may remember, for the past few months I was trying to have my department reassigned to my current boss as my old one was, in my opinion, useless. <g> So now that I accomplished that move, he's leaving! While no one has any details, part of the reason is typical of what's happening to many people everywhere: stress. We're all bound by that almighty dollar. We're told to do a lot more with a lot less. Expectations are growing while reality seems to be diminishing. No one wants to hear anything except positive attitudes. People are getting burned out attempting to achieve the impossible (okay, the unlikely!) and still being pushed harder and harder. This person was the one person that I didn't expect to "crack" because he always helped his managers and supervisors maintain our sanity. I'm not looking forward to the day he's gone and who-knows-what is there in his place! I'm already looking ahead to that next vacation!

Well, time to make sure I have everything ready for tomorrow's reunion, and whatever else I can get accomplished.

Until next time...

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A new update of AtarICQ is available for download. Lots of tweaks and small bug fixes have been made to the shell recently.

The overlay, AICQ.OVL by Dan Ackerman, has also been updated to v 29. The search function now works very well, but there are also 2 completely new functions available.

<http://gokmase.atari.org>

2 New Telnetable BBSS

Thanks to Steve Tucker's APE 98 software, telnetable Atari BBSS are popping up.

Atari Annex BBS is available at <telnet://atari.thebbs.org>

Nolan's Nest & SPACE BBS is available part-time at
<telnet://209.105.35.10>

cc65 v2.5 Crosscompiler Released

From: uz@musoftware.de (Ullrich von Bassewitz)

I'm proud to announce version 2.5 of CC65, a C crosscompiler / crossassembler combo for 6502 systems.

CC65 has C and runtime library support for many of the old 6502 machines. The libraries are fairly portable, so creating a version for other 6502s shouldn't be too much work.

Here is a list of the compiler features:

- * Includes a C compiler, macro assembler, archiver, linker, GEOS resource compiler and a front end (compile & link) utility. The assembler generates relocatable object files, the linker is very configurable and allows overlays, ROMable code, split output and much more.
- * The compiler is not quite ISO compatible, however, a large subset is supported.
- * Supported target systems are:
 - C64
 - C128
 - C16, C116, Plus/4
 - CBM 600/700 family (programs run in bank 1)
 - Newer PET machines (not 2001)
- The Apple][(thanks to Kevin Ruland <kevin@rodin.wustl.edu>)
- The Atari 8 bit machines
- GEOS for the C64 and C128

For all these systems a pre-compiled runtime and C library is available. Supporting more targets is not very difficult since the C library was written with portability in mind.

- * Several system specific support routines like a conio library or modules for joystick access are available.
- * The assembler and linker do also support the 65816 as a target,

however, the compiler is not able to generate code for this CPU and there is no RTL support.

- * Lots of docs and a few sample programs included.
- * Easy interfacing between C code and assembler.
- * Fullscreen debugger for most machines as a linkable module.
- * Full source code available as well as binaries for
 - Linux (several RedHat RPMs)
 - DOS
 - Windows 95/98/NT

What is new in this version:

- * As usual many bugs fixed (and new ones introduced, so it does not get boring:-).
- * New -j switch to make the default character signed. New #pragma to do the same.
- * Slightly better code in some situations.
- * A lot of new features for the assembler:
 - Unnamed labels
 - Several emulation features
 - Listing support
 - New built-in functions
 - Include file search path support
- * The linker generates an imports list in the map file.
- * Completely rewritten symbol table handling for the compiler.
- * Lots of code cleanups. One result of this is that the -T option does now work without clobbering the output in some cases as it was before.
- * Much more code is now shared between the tools.
- * Experimental 65C02 support for the compiler.
- * Support for the Atari 8 bit machines was contributed by the Atari team:
Christian Groessler <cpg@aladdin.de>
Mark Keates <markk@dendrite.co.uk>
Freddy Offenga <F.Offenga@student.kun.nl>
David Lloyd <dmlloyd@atari-central.com>
- * It is now possible to write GEOS programs for the C64 and C128 using cc65, thanks to the GEOSLib library contributed by Maciej Witkowiak (YTM/Elysium) <ytm@friko.onet.pl>
- * Documentation updates.
- * More minor changes.

Support for some features is still missing. To name a few:

- * No floats, no bit fields.
- * No file routines on most systems. The 8 bit Ataris are the first machines that do have full file I/O support (besides the ACE port which was dropped some time ago). Please note that the complete CBM family doesn't have file I/O support!
- * The 80 column mode on the C128 is not supported by the conio library.

More information:

For your convenience, I've put all doc files also on the web server:
<http://www.von-bassewitz.de/uz/cc65/doc/>

The cc65 main page

<http://www.von-bassewitz.de/uz/cc65/>

will get updated to reflect the new version in the next few days.

There is also a cc65 mailing list. To subscribe, send a mail to majordomo@musoftware.de with the command

subscribe cc65

in the body of the mail.

Available packages:

As usual I will provide the complete sources and several binary packages. There are some binary RPMs for different versions of RedHat Linux, which is probably one of the fastest ways to get going. Since Linux is also my development platform, new features and bug fixes are first available for Linux.

Binaries for DOS and Windows will follow or may already be available at the time you read this. While the sources do still compile under OS/2, I have dropped support for OS/2 binaries, since were almost no downloads of the OS/2 version.

Download:

For more information and links to the FTP server, see
<http://www.von-bassewitz.de/uz/cc65/>

For direct download, use

<ftp://ftp.musoftware.de/pub/uz/cc65/>

Thanks to all who sent feedback and suggestions!

--

Ullrich von Bassewitz

uz@musoftware.de

XL/XE ROM Source Code (rev. 2) Available

From: Sidney Cadot <sidney@janis.pds.tudelft.nl>

Hi everybody,

I am happy to announce the availability of the Atari XL/XE ROM reverse-engineered source code, rev. 2. This latest version uses the CC65 compiler suite, which includes a blindingly fast macro-assembler and linker. The package comprises 7 source files (13887 lines of assembly) that can be assembled and linked in 0.3 seconds (!) to yield ATARIXL.ROM and ATARIBAS.ROM, as used in several emulators that are available.

You may find the package on my Atari web-page at:

<http://ch.twi.tudelft.nl/~sidney/atari>

I'd appreciate any comments you may have, and I would also like to mention that I would welcome outside involvement for improving the quality of the source-level comments in the code.

Best regards,

Sidney Cadot

sidney@ch.twi.tudelft.nl

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

"*****"

Old Hacker's Atari User Group Newsletter Archive

A nearly complete archive of newsletters from the Old Hacker's Atari User Group is now available at <http://www.atariarchives.org/oldhackers/>

The site contains downloadable versions of the group's newsletter disks from 1990 through 2000. Disks are available in ATR, DCM, and ZIP formats. Each newsletter contains original articles plus a selection of software.

Due to declining membership, The Ol' Hackers Atari Users Group will close its doors after its final meeting in December 2000, but the newsletter archive will remain.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING compiled by Joe Mirando jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I don't know how many actual people read this column, but I guess that Mother Nature does. After last week's mention of the odd weather, it has turned warm (not hot, but warm) and incredibly humid. That's what I get for opening my big mouth, I guess. As a matter of fact, as I write this I can hear thunder in the background. A sure sign that the dog days of summer are on the way.

News on the Atari scene is, as you might expect, very slow. I can remember back when Atari computers were recognized as what they are... powerful, friendly computers that were easy to afford. Dedicated Atari magazines, major columns in "mainstream" computer magazines, mentions in media articles, placement in movies and television, and most importantly, they got some respect.

No, respect doesn't make the computer run any faster or allow it to show more colors, but it does make it easier to continue using an old computer, forgotten by most of the rest of the world. Luckily, I've not usually been swayed by what's new and/or cool. If something strikes my interest, I try it. If I find it useful or interesting, I stay with it.

Atari computers fit in nicely with what I want to do... They're easy to use, they don't have millions of options that I'll never use... or even figure out... and, most importantly to me, it just feels right.

Since you're reading this, I'm guessing that you understand. If you don't, I'm afraid that there's no way to explain it to you. "It feels right" is the only way to put it.

Even Linux, the OS I use on my PC, doesn't measure up to the 'feel' I've come to expect from good old TOS. From the disk-based TOS that shipped with the first 520 to the steroid enhanced version on the Falcon... and even MiNT and MagiC... the feel is pretty much the same. It's the feeling you get when you're in the company of a friend. You know what I mean? You pretty much know what to expect from each other

and things just tend to flow and it's... comfortable.

There seems to be a real shortage of worthwhile posts on the UseNet this week, so there really isn't much here. Sorry.

Let's take a look anyway...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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Bill F. posts this about questions concerning how the SCSI interface on a TT should be terminated:

"Regarding the advice in this thread to remove the termination resistors at the TT's SCSI port when an external SCSI drive is connected.

I got out my TT owners manual and on page 1-12, in effect it says, to add an external SCSI drive, turn off power, plug in SCSI cable, turn on power.

It is puzzling that Atari Corp would not say anything in the TT owners manual about the terminators at the port if it was really necessary to remove them. Would Atari design the TT so that it required opening up the case and removing terminators just to add an external drive? Is it possible that Atari incorporated some circuitry to automatically disable the internal terminators if an external drive is connected? Has anyone here ever seen any official documentation from Atari Corp about TT SCSI port termination?

None of my Macs require fiddling with internal terminators to add an external SCSI drive, and it seems like a very similar situation on both the TT and the Macintosh."

Lonny Pursell tells Bill:

"It's a pity the manual is that vague. Some how I'm supposed to magically know the TT has T-style chain, and I just find this out only a few days ago on this thread. I don't see where a generic scsi faq is helpful if you don't know that you have a T-style chain to begin with or how to identify one. I still say some simple block diagrams specific to Atari models would help people.

I've had 3 devices hanging out there for nearly 8 years now and those resister packs you mention have been intact. Also the internal drive was shipped to me with it's term missing. So by all standards it should of failed miserably. I managed to find an old drive that was identical to mine and have put the term in place, I also pulled the packs from the motherboard. It all works just as it did before. I'm baffled.

So after 8 years of improper termination, it is now correctly terminated I hope."

"Galen" asks about Direct to Disk software:

"I've been experimenting with the Falcon's D2D software and have come up against a couple of annoyances, the largest being that the .TRK format seems to be atypical. Does anyone have a link

to another direct to disk program for the Falcon? I experimented a bit with something called StudioSON and really liked how it could record .WAV files. I did not, however, like how it kept blowing up!"

Ken Macdonald tells Galen:

"If you treat the *.trk format as "raw" in 525.prg, you should be able to convert to any other appropriate format."

Galen tells Ken:

"True, but the conversion process happens far slower than real time. A test recording took 14 seconds of sound and converted it in about 3 minutes!"

Ben Hills adds:

"You could also try QUiNCY. QUiNCY is an eight track recorder that used to be a commercial package sold by Parx, but is now shareware. Take a look at : http://gbarges.free.fr/quincy_e.html ."

Galen replies to Ben:

"QUiNCY looks impressive. If it will also work with MIDI files it would be worth the requested \$40."

Joshua Jaijankoski asks for help with his SyQuest drive:

"I am having trouble with my SyQuest drive. I have HDDriver 7.80 and I can't get to use the drive. The driver recognizes the drive but the OS (magic) doesn't install the icon for it. Kinda like a CD-ROM, I'd like an icon on the desktop and when I put a cartridge in it would read it. The drive works perfect BTW. Any suggestions?"

Steve Sweet tells Joshua:

"Have you set the correct cluster size and minimum number of partitions in the removable media section of HD-Driver. Set these, re-boot and all should be well. You may have to re-scan drives with MAGXDESK after mounting a disk."

Hallvard Tangeraas asks for help with an IDE interface:

"I'm working on a Mega-ST at the moment, where I'm trying to install among other things an IDE harddisk (using a pre-built and tested C't IDE interface).

I have nothing but problems :-(

I don't know if it's the computer or something else, but being a Western Digital harddisk, I've heard that these have problems booting on Atari systems, for some strange reason (I have no idea why).

The drive is a "Caviar 22500".

I've used HDDriver, which supports IDE, and have tried both using the harddisk itself and a boot floppy disk. On the latter I put the "hddriver.prg" (I think that's the name) inside an AUTO folder, but it doesn't work! On the other hand, if I boot the computer, then afterwards double click that actual program it boots the harddisk fine. (??!?!??!).

So what's up with all of this, and how do I solve the problem?
And what was the key combination again for bypassing the harddisk
booting, so it only boots straight to the floppy?"

Roger Cain tells Hallvard:

"You need to "Install" the driver on the HD. This is not the same as sticking it in the /AUTO/.

Just run up the driver from the floppy and then use the supplied utils. to do the Install. This will write a special block of code to the HD boot sector which searches for and loads the driver file from the HD root directory (the driver file will be placed there by the install process)."

Hallvard tells Roger:

"I know. I was talking about the floppy for that installation.
As far as I know, putting the program in the AUTO folder should boot the harddisk, right?

I've used the install utilities. It results in 3 bombs and a lockup of the computer.

I've worked it out now!

It turned out that I should NOT have the "Master" jumper in place as I thought!!

I know next to nothing about IDE, but I'm guessing I'll need to set one device to "Master" and the other one to "Slave" if I for example add an IDE CD-ROM unit to my machine, and because of this, only 2 IDE devices can be used on each bus. Can anyone verify this?

Anyway, after removing the jumper, my computer didn't show 3 bombs as usual and lock up, but instead went straight to the desktop.
Unfortunately my Western Digital drive couldn't boot as stated by others as well, but with the aid of a floppy disk with an AUTO folder containing "HDDRIVER.PRG", it booted just fine.
One problem solved, ### more to go!"

Jorgen Nyberg asks about the new version of NEWSie:

"Is it just me, or is Newsie 96r1, a lot faster then older version?
Loading newsgroups goes 2-3 times faster than before, is it something to do with compatibility with my news server or is it faster?
Anyway, thanks John!"

James Haslam tells Jorgen:

"I think it's true. The time between each message request and data actually flowing seems to have more than halved!"

Have you also noticed that when you connect to the server, it now checks each subscribed newsgroup?

Also I used to get a few zero length messages which would stop the process, but apart from one today that keeps getting stuck after about 2K, I haven't had to press the Escape key much. Here's hoping that one is fixed too!"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - CGE 2000 Reports! Deer Avenger 3!

RomNet: 'Napster' For Games!
PSX2 Availability At Launch??
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 for PlayStation
and Sega Dreamcast Races Onto Store Shelves

Acclaim Sports announced that Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 will be in retail outlets nationwide for the PlayStation game console on Thursday, August 3 and Sega Dreamcast on Tuesday, August 8. This is the first supercross title for Sega Dreamcast. Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 is the follow-up title to the smash hit Jeremy McGrath Supercross 98, which was recently added to the official PlayStation game console 'Greatest Hits' program.

"We're very excited to be releasing Jeremy's game for the PlayStation and Sega Dreamcast. We know that gamers will appreciate the extra effort that went into making this game great," commented Steve Felsen, brand director of Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000.

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 utilizes an all-new racing engine, which features state-of-the-art graphics, physics and motion. Gamers will be able to race as or against the legendary Supercross champion Jeremy "Showtime" McGrath, John Dowd, Greg Albertyn, Sebastian Tortelli, and other superstar riders on a full season circuit using 125cc and 250cc bikes. Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 also features: eight supercross stadium courses; eight licensed motocross tracks; a custom 3D track editor; motion-captured riders; authentic rider uniforms and bike designs; and an over-the-top stunt competition.

McGrath, an avid gamer, worked as a consultant to the game developers and provided insight into track design, racing strategies and bike physics. The game also features commentary from McGrath as players race through indoor

and outdoor circuits. Since he began racing in 1989, McGrath has set countless records. Considered the "Michael Jordan" of Supercross, he has captured the 250cc Supercross title seven times and holds the record for the most career wins and championships. McGrath rides for Chaparral Yamaha.

"This game definitely captures the thrill and essence of supercross racing. I know fans are going to have an awesome experience playing it," said McGrath.

Why Can't They Leave Bambo Alone? Hunters to Get Their Due This Fall in "Deer Avenger 3...D and Deer Avenger Dreamcast"

Now the Game Is As Good As the Joke; Available on Dreamcast for the First Time

Simon & Schuster Interactive announced today that Bambo, the avenging stag from the best-selling hunting parody "Deer Avenger"

will star in two new installments entitled DEER AVENGER 3...D (Windows 98/95) and DEER AVENGER DREAMCAST (Dreamcast game console). In this unique twist on the hunting simulation genre, DEER AVENGER is now as good as the joke and will be one of the first popular casual games developed for Dreamcast. Both games utilize 3D accelerated graphics to create an exciting "hunting" experience loaded with great humor, hilarious story lines and slapstick comic situations for engaging gameplay and hours of fun. DEER AVENGER 3...D is estimated to release in September 2000. DEER AVENGER DREAMCAST is estimated to release in November 2000.

"The Deer Avenger parody series is becoming increasingly popular, evidenced by the fact that we now own approximately 16 percent of the hunting simulation market," said Jeff Siegel, vice president and creative director for Simon & Schuster Interactive. "By launching this game on the Sega Dreamcast, we are bringing the unexpected fun that Deer Avenger delivers to a new audience of gamers."

Bambo, Deer Avenger's hero character, is trying to spend a little "quality time" with his amorous girlfriend when their interlude is interrupted by the frantic pleas of the forest animals. "Help us!" the animals cry. "The hunters are back!" Bambo easily dismisses their pathetic cries for help and turns back to Jane. Upset by the animals' cries, Jane explains to Bambo that she cannot "get in the mood" until the animals are safe. Angry and frustrated, Bambo sets out to find and eliminate the obstacles that are keeping him from his true love. He will make them pay...dearly.

Players hunt in four different hunting environments during the summer or winter seasons. Explore in rich 3D environments, complete with lakes, trees and other obstacles to hide behind, climb over or swim through. Players encounter over a dozen 3D characters with varying degrees of skill and intelligence, and have access to Bambo's arsenal of 10 weapons that are accumulated after each kill. Bambo's own extremely lethal particle farts can also locate, lure, scare or destroy the hunters.

DEER AVENGER 3...D and DEER AVENGER DREAMCAST are being developed by veteran Deer Avenger creator Hypnotix, Inc. DEER AVENGER 3...D for PC will be available in September. DEER AVENGER 3...D DREAMCAST is estimated to be released in November. A 3D-accelerator card is recommended for optimum

graphic viewing on PC-based machines. A Dreamcast game console is required for DEER AVENGER DREAMCAST.

DEER AVENGER 3...D for PC and DREAMCAST will be rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). More information can be found at www.esrb.org.

THQ to Publish "Chicken Run" for Game Boy Color

THQ Inc. announced an agreement with Blitz Games to publish and distribute "Chicken Run" for Game Boy Color. The game, based on the hit animated summer blockbuster "Chicken Run", will release worldwide in fall 2000.

"The movie 'Chicken Run', has proven to be a fun-filled family hit and is on its way to break \$100 million in the domestic box office this summer," stated Germaine Gioia, vice president, licensing, THQ. "The Game Boy Color system is more popular than ever, and we are delighted to be working with DreamWorks and Blitz Games in adding such a high-profile title to THQ's extensive Game Boy Color library."

"The story of 'Chicken Run' -- a flock of chickens trying to escape Tweedy Farm before they're turned into chicken pies -- lends itself very easily to an interactive adventure," said Rick Rekedal, Head of Toys and Licensing for DreamWorks Consumer Products. "We're delighted to be working with THQ and Blitz Games on the Game Boy Color release."

"Given their tremendous experience and proven track record on the popular hand-held system, THQ is the best Game Boy Color publishing partner," said Philip Oliver, managing director, Blitz Games. "With 'Chicken Run,' we hope to offer a fun, highly addictive Game Boy Color adventure for kids of all ages."

"Chicken Run" for Game Boy Color is a mission-based adventure allowing players to maneuver through each level as the movie's hero Ginger. Based on the movie, Ginger's objective in the game is to lead "Hut 17" and the rest of the chickens on the farm in their escape from the perils of Mr. and Mrs. Tweedy's chicken pie machine. Each level will feature movie-inspired environments and obstacles that Ginger can use to lead her friends to freedom.

PSX2 Launch Day Availability Examined

Several retailers have stopped their PSX2 preorder campaigns. We take a look at the retail plans for major retailers as they prepare for the PSX2 launch.

Several premier video game retailers have stopped their preorder campaigns for the Sony PlayStation 2 console. The reason behind the move is the expectation of retailers such as Electronics Boutique and Funcoland that the initial supply of PSX2 consoles, accessories, and games will not match the expected demand. At this time, it is likely that gamers who preorder the console now will not receive their PlayStation 2 on October 26, the system's launch date.

GameSpot spoke with major retailers regarding the availability of the PlayStation 2 console at both their online and standard retail outlets. Each company and its plans for PSX2 preorder and launch sales is detailed below:

Electronics Boutique has stopped all preorders at its standard retail outlets. It is still taking orders online through EBWorld.com, but the company does not guarantee that customers ordering online now will receive their console on October 26.

Babbages/Gamestop is taking preorders for the October 26 shipment through its online store, Gamestop.com. However, customers who have placed their orders after July 3 are not guaranteed to receive the console at launch. The company's standard Babbages and Gamestop stores are only taking preorders for the third shipment - set to arrive around Christmas.

Funcoland has stopped preorders at its standard retail stores and does not expect to restart the campaign before launch. The company is still taking preorders online through Funcoland.com, but customers who order after August 1 may not receive the console on October 26.

Toys 'R Us has also stopped all standard preorders at this time. In fact, the company does not expect to restart the preorder campaign. However, it hopes to receive some additional units of the console that will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Its online store (ToysRUs.com) is still taking preorders, but launch day availability is once again suspect.

WalMart and Target have not initiated a preorder campaign for the Sony PlayStation 2. Both retailers will be selling the console, games, and accessories on a first-come, first-served basis. For those who haven't preordered yet, these major department stores may provide the largest supply of PSX2 consoles on launch day.

These policies are being implemented at most locations across all of the retail chains.

New Napster-like Service Allows Game Swapping

Taking a page from Napster's strategy, a group of programmers has begun a project to let people swap games for video game consoles such as the Nintendo 64 or Sega Genesis.

The site, called, RomNet, permits participants to exchange software copied from video game cartridge chips called ROM, or read-only memory. The software extracted from ROM then can be played on personal computers using emulation software such as UltraHLE.

While sites already exist from which people can download the games, RomNet offers the same sort of flea market ambience that Napster brought to MP3 music files. Instead of only being able to find games at a central server, users can browse for games located on any and all of the computers hooked into RomNet. In addition, because the files aren't stored on a central server, it becomes more difficult for developers to crack down on software pirates.

Napster is a file-sharing service that is in the midst of a lawsuit

brought by the Recording Industry Association of America. Though Napster's fate is uncertain, there's no question the company would be worse off if it stored MP3 music files itself instead of just providing a service that enables members to locate those files on each other's computers.

RomNet is aware of piracy issues, but curiously has made its file-sharing terms more liberal just in the past day.

Yesterday, the RomNet site said, "Users may not download a ROM unless it is known to be freeware and not copyrighted." Today, though, those terms were relaxed: "Users may not download a ROM unless they own the game itself," the site states. The new terms appear to expand the universe of games exchanged on the site to include those protected by copyrights.

Some fear that "peer-to-peer" software sharing, such as what Napster enables, will threaten the entertainment industry by making it easy to evade copyright restrictions on redistribution of music, movies and other digital information.

Regardless of how files are shared, there are legal issues surrounding the use of video game ROMs on ordinary PCs.

Emulator software that allows PCs to play discs intended for game consoles has proven to be a legally contentious business for companies such as Bleem and Connectix, which have been embroiled in court battles with Sony.

Emulation poses a real financial threat to Sony, Nintendo and others who depend upon game sales to survive. These companies generally sell their consoles at a loss, making up the difference through software sales.

The first version of RomNet went live last week, and already thousands of users have visited the site. Lead programmer Jeffrey Freeman has been issuing steady upgrades to the client software to improve connection speed and other factors.

One potential concern with the RomNet software is that it displays the Internet addresses of those sharing files--information that people who are worried about copyright enforcement aren't likely to want broadcast.

Searching on the site reveals software for Nintendo's Gameboy, Super Nintendo and Nintendo 64 gaming systems, as well as for Sega's Genesis. Games online include commercial titles such as "Goldeneye," "Pokemon," "Sonic the Hedgehog," "Afterburn," "Tetris," "Earthworm Jim" and others.

Games can be copied by backing up the program to a Zip disk, then transferring the Zip disk to a hard drive, programmers familiar with the technology said.

SegaNet Offers Console Gamers Online Quake III Arena Gameplay at QuakeCon 2000

At QuakeCon 2000, SegaNet, the only online high-speed console gaming network, announced it will make Quake III Arena available for online game play to the public for the first time. Competing over the Internet, Sega Dreamcast gamers will be able to play Quake III Arena against fellow QuakeCon attendees.

"Gamers can now experience Quake III Arena, one of the Internet's most popular games, online with the Dreamcast," said Charles Bellfield, director of marketing communications, Sega of America.

The Sega Dreamcast version of Quake III Arena has exclusive new arenas, a completely re-designed user interface and menu system, as well as an innovative two to four-player split screen option for non-stop action. Players are invited to test their skill against history's fiercest warriors while prowling dark hallways and courtyards in gothic arenas and frightening futuristic spacescapes.

SegaNet, the only high-speed online console gaming network will offer gamers 3-D multiplayer games, chat, community, cheat codes, tournaments and content. SegaNet is also an ISP service for Sega Dreamcast and PC users, offering gamers the best in speed, consistent low latency, customer service and access to all other areas of the web, including personal e-mail (name@sega.net). Additionally, SegaNet will provide gamers content on complementary areas of interest, including music, TV, movies, sports and e-commerce.

InterAct Introduces an Internet-Friendly GameShark for Game Boy

InterAct Accessories will introduce a new GameShark for Game Boy with Internet connection and 2,000 Pokemon codes. This new GameShark will be available to retailers nationwide in September, coinciding with the highly-anticipated release of Pokemon Gold and Silver. This upgraded version will now allow gamers to download codes from their PC directly to their GameShark.

The new GameShark for Game Boy has upgraded its internal cheat list by featuring hundreds more game-busting codes. This product will include a link cable and a PC software support CD that allows gamers to log onto GameShark.com with their PC and download codes directly into the GameShark. Pokemon fans will receive an added treat: a Pokemon Code Book with 2,000 codes for Pokemon Red/Blue, Pokemon Yellow, Pokemon Trading Card and Pokemon Pinball will be included with each new GameShark for Game Boy. Game Boy gamers will be able to reach new levels when playing their favorite Pokemon game.

"GameShark has quickly become one of the most recognizable names in gaming because of the unique experience this product brings to consumers," said Dean Stoyer, Director of Marketing for InterAct Accessories. "We made sure that this new version of the GameShark for Game Boy is targeted at the gaming needs of the Pokemon fan."

In addition, the new version of the GameShark for Game Boy will support hundreds of codes with its massive memory. Gamers will also be able to exchange game codes with other GameShark owners via an infrared transfer feature.

The new version of GameShark for Game Boy will be available in September, 2000 at all major toy and electronic retailers nationwide in time for the anticipated release of Pokemon Gold and Silver. The GameShark for Game Boy, with the upgrade features listed above, will continue to carry the same low MSRP of \$29.99.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online

- Online Users Growl & Purr!

"~~~~~"

Songbird CGE2K Report

Wow, just got back to MN early this morning after a fun but exhausting expo. Not sure what attendance was like this year vs. last year, but I do know that Sunday attendance was a big improvement over last year. And I stayed VERY busy at the Songbird booth the entire time! It was rare that I had more than 5 minutes go by without someone wanting to try a Jag or Lynx game, see some unreleased stuff, etc. People got to play Lynx Cybervirus, Eye of the Beholder, and Relief Pitcher, while on the Jag side we did have Phaze Zero and a prototype 'shareware' cart for demo.

Songbird customers got to pick up the new Songbird Jaguar games at great prices, and I went through almost all the assorted Jaguar stock I brought with me. Lynx sales were a little slower than I hoped, but the new games were still well received and I even found some new customers for Ponx and Lexis! Not to mention equipping a few former INTV and 5200 developers with low-cost Lynx developer kits which was great fun... =^)

I didn't get much time to stop by other booths, but it is always great to chat with Hasbro, Telegames, B&C, CGE staff, and the rest.

Thanks to everyone who made this another incredible event! I hope to see even more people attend next year. Considering the exclusive game releases, great deals on new and old merchandise, the chance to meet former and current game developers, the swap meet, and the one-of-a-kind museum, I think there are plenty of reasons to make CGE a 'must-go' event for classic/Atari gamers.

Sincerely,

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions
<http://songbird.atari.net>

From Jaguar Interactive message boards:

Re: CGEXPO - DISASTER??? OR FLOP???????????

>Just waiting for information about the CGEXPO since Saturday. Only Carl posted some stuff. Was this just a flop or what????

Well, I've been to all three of the shows so far (WOA and the two CGE's) and this one was kinda mediocre. On the plus side, there were tons of people there and Ralph Baer once again made an appearance. Someone brought tons of laserdisc arcade machines (Cliffhanger, Cobra Command, Badlands, Dragon's Lair, Thayer's Quest among others) all set to free play.

On the down side, the number of special guest speakers who actually showed was way down from last year. As a result, some of the panels were one or two people and not very well organized. Some panels went late or started late and the organizers seemed to be constantly running in and out to keep things on track. This lack of organization was one thing that really made WOA '98 a disappointment for me. Last year, the panels were extremely well organized, although the panels were too large. I wish they could find a happy medium or offer two panel tracks so that you could choose who you wanted to see and all of the speakers would have an opportunity to speak.

The other parts of the show like the vendors were the same as last year and many vendors even brought the same stock as last year (telegames, B&C, and United Game literally had identical stock as last year). The "exclusive" prototype games which were sold were interesting but overpriced in my opinion. I bought the Odyssey 2 cart signed by Mr. Baer for \$25 which I thought was reasonable. The Colecovision carts were \$30 and \$40 and didn't quite sell out. The INTV booth had several "protos" as well, but at \$25-\$30 each, I passed on them. They will be selling them on their site as well, so I don't think I missed out.

I think in general the show was good, but as a general rule I think these things should get better year after year. Unfortunately, there was little improvement this year and maybe even some slippage. That's just my opinion.

Playing Around at the Classic Gamers Expo

Compared to the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), the Classic Gamers Expo (CGE) is just a speck. E3 fills the entire Los Angeles convention center and spills out into neighboring buildings. By comparison, CGE fits nicely into a single ballroom of the Plaza Hotel, a good-sized downtown Las Vegas hotel.

Mind you, this is a downtown hotel, not a strip hotel such as the MGM Grand or Caesar's Palace with auditoriums that are large enough to host heavyweight title fights. The ballroom used for CGE would be appropriate for a really big bar mitzvah.

The attendance is much smaller, too. E3 has hundreds of exhibitors displaying their products to tens of thousands of attendees. CGE had 18 booths and hundreds of attendees.

But don't let the size fool you. The Classic Gamers Expo may be small; but an elite and highly-educated crowd of people attend this convention with money to spend and specific ideas about what they are looking for.

Take, for instance, Michael Mize, a space shuttle technician who traveled from Coco, Florida, to attend the convention. Mize owns seven arcade games, 15 additional arcade boards, and somewhere between 6,500 and 7,000 game cartridges.

Asked what brought him to CGE, Mize says the convention is one of the only places he can go to add to his collection. "In part it is the exclusivity of some of the game releases," says Mize. "If you want it, you gotta come here to get it."

Not everything that Mize bought at this year's convention was old. A few of the exhibitors such as Songbird Productions and Intellivision Productions

released new games for such 70's and 80's systems as Intellivision, ColecoVision and Atari 2600.

While the new games for ColecoVision and 2600 such as Steamroller may have a certain novelty about them, they are graphically primitive compared to today's games. Looks, according to Mize, are very deceiving.

"Maybe the graphics aren't there, but the play is there. Look at games like Venture, Cosmic Avenger, and Bump and Jump on ColecoVision, and they look like stupid, silly games; but no one has been able to replicate that kind of gameplay."

Former Atari game designer Howard Scott Warshaw explains it a different way. "If you offer to give a kid Disney's Space Mountain or a ball, nine out of ten kids will take Space Mountain; but it's the tenth kid that's going to have the friends. You get bored of all of the fancy things after a while, but that ball has lasting value."

Warshaw, who holds a special place of honor and derision in the annals of gaming history, is the only Atari game designer to have sold more than 1 million copies of every game he made. On the other hand, along with such classics as Raiders of the Lost Ark and Yar's Revenge, Warshaw created the infamous E.T. cartridge, the game that some blame for the downfall of Atari.

Warshaw temporarily left the video game industry for several years during which time he worked in video production. He returns to CGE every year, putting up with jokes about E.T. and signing copies of Yar's Revenge while selling Once Upon Atari, a video he produced about the history of Atari. (Once Upon Atari is available at www.scottw.com.)

Walking along the floor at CGE, you are constantly reminded that the video game industry was once an American industry. Attendees at the show sorted through stacks of Atari, Coleco and Intellivision games in search of the rare item they needed to complete their collection. Sega and Nintendo were barely visible at the show; and with the exception of a PlayStation CD filled with classic Intellivision games, Sony was unrepresented.

One of the highlights of CGE are the celebrities who attend it. This year's convention included the likes of Ralph Baer, the engineer who created Odyssey, the first home game console; Joe Decuir, co-designer of the Atari 2600; and Keith Robinson, the former Mattel employee who now owns the rights to Intellivision.

One of the most interesting guests at this year's CGE was Billy Mitchell, the man Namco dubbed "Video Game Player of the Century." On July 3, Mitchell scored the world's first perfect game of Pac-Man, logging in 3,333,360 points and not missing a single fruit or ghost as he played the game until a long-known but seldom reached programming glitch stopped his game.

Walking the floor and trying his hand at the classic coin-operated games along the wall, Mitchell demonstrated that his skills were not limited to Pac-Man. He played through level after level of Zaxxon with ease; but when I asked him which game he was best at, he smiled and said, "It sure as hell isn't Zaxxon. These days I'm more into Donkey Kong."

So what is the attraction of these classic games and why are they still popular 20 years later? Many of the people at the show say it is nostalgia, but Howard Warshaw has a different view. "We look back at these games and

tend to remember the best ones, the ones we really liked. Of course they're going to seem better than the latest games. When you think about today's games, you think about the good and the bad ones. When you think about the classics, you remember nothing but the best."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Intel Unveils 1.13 Gigahertz Chip

Intel on Monday introduced a Pentium III processor running faster than one gigahertz, beating rival Advanced Micro Devices Inc. to the punch for bragging rights to the speediest computer chip on the market.

AMD earlier this year beat Intel to the market by a few days with the first chip to run at one gigahertz, and plans to begin shipping a 1.1 gigahertz chip on Aug. 28.

Processors are the "brains" of personal computers. One measure of their performance is the "clock speed," measured in hertz, or cycles per second. Intel's new Pentium runs at 1.13 gigahertz, or 1.13 billion cycles per second.

Intel and other chipmakers, who typically get much of their profits from such high-end chips, have accelerated the introduction of faster chips because of breakthrough manufacturing technologies.

Much of the existing software on the market today requires far less processing power than the fastest chips provide, although the new chips demonstrably speed up games and graphics.

The new 1.13 gigahertz chip is priced at \$990 when shipping in units of 1,000 to computer manufacturers, although Intel noted it will be available only in limited quantities.

Because of production problems, Intel has made few of the gigahertz chips it introduced earlier this year.

Santa Clara, Calif.-based Intel later this year will begin shipping a Pentium 4 chip that initially runs at 1.4 gigahertz, while AMD will begin shipping its first Athlon processors for notebook computers.

New Macs Enter the Retail Channel

Not every model is available, but less than two weeks after Steve Jobs' dramatic hardware announcements at Macworld Expo New York, Apple's latest iMacs and Power Mac G4s are finding their way into retail channels and

selling in healthy numbers, resellers told MacWEEK. Although the Power Mac G4 Cube won't hit retail shelves until early August, resellers report that they are taking significant preorders for the new model.

"Apple is doing a good job shipping these products as it said it would," said Dan DeVries, Executive VP of sales and marketing for MacMall, a Mac catalog site. MacMall currently has the new Power Mac G4 400s in stock, and he expects MP G4 450s this week and 500MHz MP G4s the week after. He added that MacMall has taken substantial numbers of pre-orders for the new MP Power Macs. "These Macs are made for graphics professionals, and that is one of the markets we specialize in," he said.

The new iMacs are also moving into the channel quickly, DeVries said. MacMall already has Indigo iMac DVs, and Graphite and Snow iMac DV SEs, and expects Ruby and Sage iMac DV+ models by the middle of the week. The \$799 entry-level iMac is expected in September.

On the brick-and-mortar side, Circuit City announced the day before Jobs' keynote that it would re-enter the Mac market, selling iBooks, iMacs and AirPort products. Bill Cimino, a Circuit City spokesman, told MacWEEK that the retail chain will have the new iMacs in special displays with DV camcorders by August 1. Cimino added that Circuit City will carry some Apple-specific software in addition to dual-platform games.

At ComputerWare, a Mac-only reseller in San Francisco, manager Jeff Korst reported that all of the new Macs were selling well. He said the store has the new Power Mac G4 400s and 450s in stock, as well as the iMac DV+ and iMac DV SEs.

An Apple spokeswoman declined to discuss sales numbers, but said that the company is pleased with the response so far.

Apple Suit Calls Attention to iBook Rumor

Apple Computer's recent lawsuit to clamp down on leaks has inadvertently put the spotlight on rumored details of the company's next iBook notebook computer.

In a lawsuit filed this week, Apple alleged that an unknown individual who goes by the name of "worker bee" posted information to the Internet about Apple's new mouse and dual-processor PowerMacs before their introduction last month. Apple also said that "worker bee" posted information last month about a third product Apple has yet to introduce.

The third product appears to be a new version of the iBook with a faster processor, as the notebook was a subject of a post from the anonymous person that day.

The ironic twist is a sidelight in the closely followed case. Apple, notorious even among computer companies for its obsession with secrecy, is doggedly trying to ascertain the identity of "worker bee" and stop the leaks.

As reported earlier, Apple subpoenaed Yahoo to disclose any information the company had on "worker bee." The anonymous poster allegedly put photos of the mouse and PowerMac on two GeoCities Web sites; GeoCities is owned by Yahoo.

In its legal documents, Apple security official Robin Zonic refers to several postings in the forums of the AppleInsider rumor site. Zonic also says in a filing that "on July 25, 2000, I found postings from 'worker bee' that included detailed specifications for an as-yet unreleased Apple product."

"Worker bee" that day posted details on the upcoming iBook to AppleInsider's forums in response to a question from a reader. But Zonic did not say whether the posting was to AppleInsider, so it is possible Apple is referring to a posting somewhere else.

"Worker bee" said the iBook would contain "up to 466 MHz, DVD, 1 firewire port, 8Mb of VRAM, screen size will remain the same, don't know about new colors...yet."

Apple would not comment on details regarding the new iBook or comment on whether the iBook was the product referred to in its legal documents.

If that is the posting to which Apple is referring, it must have been somewhere on the mark to qualify as a trade secret, according to intellectual property lawyer Daniel Harris, of Brobeck Phleger & Harrison.

Harris said that some, but not necessarily all, of the information would either have to be correct or at least on the drawing board.

"It wouldn't be confidential if it wasn't talked about within Apple," Harris said.

Microsoft Releases First Bug Fixes for Windows 2000

Software giant Microsoft released the first batch of updates and bug fixes for Windows 2000 on Monday, a move expected to boost sales as it makes its new flagship computer operating system more secure, reliable and easier to use in concert with other software.

Service Pack 1 fixes scores of problems ranging from security issues to ensuring compatibility with more software and devices, and boosting the overall reliability of the program, Microsoft said.

The update, available a day earlier than the Aug. 1 release date Microsoft had promised, can be ordered on CD or downloaded from the company's Web site.

Windows 2000 is the Redmond, Wash.-based company's newest operating system to power corporate networks or Web sites.

Costing more than \$1 billion and taking three years to develop, it was unveiled in February and is considered Microsoft's most stable and powerful product yet.

Although sales of Windows 2000 have far outstripped those of Microsoft's previous business operating systems, many analysts have said uptake has been slower than expected.

Apart from a recent sluggishness in the market for business computers, analysts have cited a wait-and-see attitude among many businesses wary of

investing in a new product until initial problems could be fixed.

Now that Service Pack 1 is available, more companies could decide to deploy Windows 2000, they said.

Microsoft Cookie Tool Stirs Controversy

What began as an effort to give Web browser users more control over their privacy has put Microsoft in the cross-fire of Web advertisers and privacy advocates.

With Internet Explorer 5.5, Microsoft is testing a cookie management feature that blocks certain kinds of cookies -- data records created by a browser that preserve information about Web sessions.

The seemingly innocuous add-on has raised the ire of Web advertising services and e-commerce vendors that claim the feature unfairly excludes them from the benefits of cookies: driving traffic and ad dollars to a site and supplying key demographic data to e-businesses.

Microsoft's technology blocks cookies that come from outside companies or advertisers that supply content to a site. These third-party cookies enable services to track, but not identify, a user throughout the Web. The feature concerns some parties that fear the Redmond, Wash., company is once again using its heavy hand.

"Whether this act is pernicious or not, Microsoft has set themselves to be the arbiters of what technological options will be available to Web servers in terms of screening the information," said Jason Mahler, general counsel of the Computer and Communications Industry Association, in Washington.

Others, however, view the cookie management application as a step in the right direction to improve Internet privacy.

"Privacy advocates have been asking for this since 1996," said Jason Catlett, president of Junkbusters Corp., a Green Brook, N.J., company that develops software to combat cookies and other marketing tactics. "The issue here is that third-party cookies are tracking Web surfers' movements across the Web without them knowing it."

Nevertheless, cookies are absolutely crucial to many e-commerce business models. Sites rely on the services of companies such as DoubleClick Inc. and Engage Technologies Inc., which use cookies to measure site traffic in order to target advertisers. Third-party cookies allow smaller sites to band together and have ads sold and delivered by ad networks to compete with larger Web sites.

With the cookie management feature in IE 5.5, every third-party cookie sent to the browser generates a dialog box that asks the user whether to accept or block the cookie. Users can check a box that eliminates further warnings.

"I tried it. Forget it. You just have to turn it off," said Rich LeFurgy, head of the Internet Advertising Bureau, in San Francisco. LeFurgy said users receive too many cookies to have a dialog box pop up every time a server wants to send one.

Users receive no warning when a first-party cookie -- one that returns only to the site to which the user is connected -- is set on their hard drives. In effect, IE 5.5 treats third-party cookies as less secure technology than first-party cookies. Further, LeFurgy and others said, the barrage of "security alert" dialog boxes will scare users, inviting them to shut off third-party cookies.

"This is a beta test to test market acceptance of the concept of differentiated cookie settings," said Richard Purcell, director of corporate privacy at Microsoft. "We find that when there's a third party involved [privacy] information is generally hard to get. So we began planning ways that our technology might be useful to consumers."

Fear of third-party cookies is an understandable position given the notorious case of New York-based DoubleClick, which was investigated in May for plans to connect aggregate cookie data with a database that included names, addresses and other personal information. DoubleClick eventually backed off its plans; officials there had no comment on Microsoft's cookie management technology.

Such incidents, however, are an example of the pressure that e-businesses and advertisers are under to capture critical customer data.

"The average consumer doesn't understand what they're giving up when they block cookies," said Stefan Tornquist, marketing director at Bluestreak.com Inc., a Newport, R.I., online advertising and marketing company that offers technology that tracks traffic without cookies or in conjunction with cookies. "Today's invasion of privacy is tomorrow's convenience."

Bonnie Lowell, chief technology officer of the Personalization Consortium and co-chair of the group's privacy committee, also extolled the virtues of cookies -- as long as they're used prudently.

"I really would be concerned if people thought [Microsoft's cookie management] was the answer to the online privacy problem," Lowell said. "People have an expectation that all cookies are bad, but most are good cookies."

Nevertheless, the issue of cookies will likely end up under the microscope of the government on an ever-increasing pile of high-technology issues. Late this week, the Federal Trade Commission endorsed a plan by members of the Network Advertising Initiative, including DoubleClick, Engage, AdForce LLC and others, to regulate themselves under a set of privacy principles that give consumers more control over what those vendors do with data collected through third-party cookies.

Napster Hopes to Settle, Foes Less Receptive

While Napster Inc. hopes to settle its copyright legal battle with the recording industry outside of court, industry sources said the song-swap company's opponents were less enthusiastic about a deal.

"I think there is an opportunity for a settlement," Hank Barry, chief executive officer of Napster told Reuters this weekend, but added there were no substantive discussions.

Officials at the big five recording companies, which are among the firms suing Napster -- alleging that it facilitates wholesale music piracy -- as well as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) declined to comment on the prospects for a settlement.

However, a high-ranking music industry source familiar with the situation said, "There may be talks occurring but a settlement is unlikely."

Barry said Napster has been constantly reaching out to try to bring both sides together and that he would continue these efforts following Friday's last-minute reprieve by a federal appeals court that reversed a U.S. District Judge's order to shut the song-swap service down last Friday.

The reversal by an appeals court on Friday was a stinging defeat for the RIAA, whose suit against Napster has turned into a landmark case over copyright protection on the Internet.

While members of the recording industry declined to speak on the record about the matter, many voiced their skepticism regarding the likelihood of a settlement.

"Napster doesn't even have a business plan. There's really nothing they could offer us in settlement talks except a mailing list of people who want free music," said one recording company executive requesting anonymity.

Another executive noted that if the recording industry were to settle, it would effectively "sink our case."

Others agree that with scores of users flocking to Napster and other file-sharing services, the best the recording industry could hope for is a legal victory, which would establish parameters for intellectual property on the Internet and hopefully discourage investors from backing companies like Napster.

"Nobody thinks the technology is going away. The point is to win the suit and keep the venture capitalists away from it (Napster)," said another record executive.

Not everyone is so sure a settlement can't be reached, however. "I think it's inevitable," said a source at a big record label.

The challenge is for the two sides to arrive at a business model that would enable the recording industry to capitalize on Napster's base of more than 20 million music fans.

Sources said the two sides sharply differ on whether the appropriate model for getting money from Napster should be based on a per transfer fee or a blanket percentage of any revenues like a radio station as well as other models. The recording industry has been criticized for creating its own problem by dragging its feet on digital downloading.

Several experts, however, see difficulties in applying any of these traditional models to Napster or other file-sharing services.

"Record labels may be able to move into that, but there are some difficult technological issues to get to that point," said Malcolm MacLachlan, an analyst with International Data Corp..

A multi-industry forum known as the Secure Digital Music Initiative (SDMI),

created to come up with a standard for anti-copying technologies, has been dogged by delays.

The SDMI on Monday announced it began work on amending its specification for portable devices such as cell phones, radios and voice recorders.

The companies represented by the RIAA in the lawsuit include Seagram Co. Ltd.'s Universal Music, Bertelsmann AG's BMG, Sony Corp.'s Sony Music Entertainment, Time Warner Inc.'s Warner Music Group and EMI Group Plc.

AltaVista Unveils New Features

Internet search engine operator AltaVista Co. is still trying to find its identity, but CEO Rod Schrock believes the firm's long quest for profits is nearly over.

As AltaVista announced another makeover of its popular Web site, Schrock disclosed in an interview Tuesday that the Palo Alto-based company lost roughly \$30 million on \$70 million in revenue during the quarter ending July 31.

The company lost \$237 million on revenues of \$34 million in last year's second quarter, which ended June 30. AltaVista has since changed from a fiscal year ending Jan. 31 instead of Dec. 31.

The company has reduced its quarterly losses by about \$20 million during the past six months and Schrock now expects the 5-year-old company to post its first quarterly profit by the end of this fiscal year. He suggested that AltaVista will revive a long-delayed initial public offering of stock as soon as the company is in the black.

The company, which has lost about \$800 million since its inception, indefinitely postponed a \$19-per-share IPO in April in the midst of a mass technology stock sell-off.

Although many tech stocks have recovered from that shock, investors still have little interest in unprofitable Internet-related companies.

"The market certainly has been seesawing, but we are going to be profitable by the end of the year and profitable companies deserve to be public," Schrock said.

AltaVista's latest changes feature a multimedia search function that will allow users to view the various images fetched after a request. The site also has introduced a "Power Search" function that enables users to narrow the scope of their requests by clicking on easy-to-understand menus instead of relying on "Boolean" language - a formulaic way of wording a request.

Lydia Louizides, a Web technology analyst for Jupiter Communications, said AltaVista's renovations are an improvement because the site now places greater emphasis on entertainment, sports and e-commerce. "Those are the places where people really seem to want to go on the Web."

Danny Sullivan, an analyst with SearchEngineWatch.com, said AltaVista's changes are more in style than substance.

"This strikes me as a sort of a facelift," he said. "This is more about AltaVista trying to make things right, rather than the company making a big breakthrough in its technology."

Regardless, AltaVista believes the retooling of its search engine will help continue its recent surge in popularity among Web surfers trying to find specific information, images or sounds.

A recent survey by StatMarket ranked AltaVista as the second most popular search engine behind Yahoo! The survey said AltaVista held 16.6 percent of the search engine market as of July 4, up from 9 percent in April 1999.

The June rankings of NielsenNetRatings placed AltaVista behind Yahoo! and Lycos in the search engine race, but ahead of Excite - a portal that the company trailed earlier in the year.

Including all sites, AltaVista's online network was the eighth most popular destination on the Web with 15.6 million unique visitors in June, according to Media Metrix. The June figure represented a 27 percent increase from February's traffic.

Besides its main site, AltaVista also owns shopping.com, ragingbull.com and a more streamlined search engine, raging.com, introduced three months ago.

Most of the company's progress has come since last October when management stepped up AltaVista's marketing efforts under a new regime. The company - now controlled by CMGI Ventures after previous ownerships under Digital Equipment and Compaq Computer - budgeted about \$120 million for the past year's marketing efforts.

Web Body To Accept Address Plans

The Internet's oversight body said Thursday it will accept proposals next month for expanding the pool of online addresses used to find Web sites.

New domain names such as ".movie" or ".travel" would help relieve the crowded field of dot-coms. They would be the first global suffixes added since the 1980s, when Net use was limited to academics and bureaucrats.

"We're within striking distance," said Andrew McLaughlin, chief policy officer for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers.

"Barring some disasters, we'll start seeing new names early next year."

As the Internet grows, the pool of short, simple names shrinks. So the Internet needs new domain suffixes, the same way the phone system often requires new area codes.

At stake is a New Economy increasingly dependent on the Net and on customers' ability to easily find Web sites.

ICANN will issue formal guidelines as early as Friday. For a \$50,000 application fee, any company or organization may propose a new suffix. Applications will be accepted Sept. 5-Oct. 2, and two weeks of public commenting will follow.

The Net organization will review the proposals and approve a half dozen or so new names at its annual meeting in November.

Several questions remain on how the new names would blend with existing ones. For instance, would Ford Motor Co., the owner of Ford.com, automatically have the right to any new name, even if former President Gerald Ford wants it for a presidential library? And would a name like ".museum" be open to anyone, or only to exhibitors?

ICANN has not made any decision on these or many other issues, and has asked applicants to propose solutions. Many critics believe ICANN should have settled these matters ahead of time.

But McLaughlin said the group wanted input from the Internet community to avoid appearing "top down and heavy-handed."

In making a final decision, the organization will also consider how the new name would be managed and what needs it would fulfill.

Meanwhile, ICANN finished registering voters to elect five board members this fall. Those members would contribute to future policy decisions on domain names and other Net issues.

More than 158,000 Internet users signed up, far greater than the 10,000 that ICANN initially expected. As a result, the registration system broke down, and many users were unable to register in time.

Voting will take place by continent in early October.

Four North Americans are on the ballot so far: Lyman Chapin, chief scientist of BBN Technologies in Cambridge, Mass.; Donald Langenberg, chancellor of the University System of Maryland; Lawrence Lessig, law professor at Harvard University; and Harris Miller, president of the Information Technology Association of America.

For Hire: Someone to Browse When You Can't

Lenny Young's epiphany came while riding in a cab through Manhattan.

The cab driver got lost on his way to Rockefeller Center, so Young, in from Los Angeles on business, used his cell phone to call a friend in the city who located the directions on the Web and passed them along. Then the friend suggested going out to dinner that night, and used the Web to pick a restaurant and give Young directions.

That's what everybody needs, Young remembers thinking, someone who's online when you can't be -- an Internet valet.

The notion led Young to start iNetNow (<http://www.inetnow.com>), a private Los Angeles start-up that employs a crew of "expert surfers" to assist people finding information online when they are away from their computers.

The year-old company is one of several looking to serve the needs of people who use cell phones to access information from the Web while they are in their cars or otherwise on the move.

The vast majority of these companies are so-called "voice portals" that let people listen to audio menus or speak their questions into a telephone handset and use speech recognition technology to process the request and

send it to the caller in the form of prerecorded sound bites.

iNetNow, on the other hand, relies on plain old human beings to listen to questions, search and deliver answers.

"The best way to mirror the full extent of the Net is to talk to a person. They have everything you don't have when you're calling from a phone: high-speed access, the ability to interact and a display device that's bigger than your phone," Young said.

It's an intriguing concept. One that is so new it's too early to tell whether people will go for it. iNetNow has been offering free searches to Los Angeles residents since March, and will start charging on Sept. 1, when the service goes nationwide. Young won't say how many calls his crew is handling. However, investors like the business. So far, venture capitalists have poured \$17 million into it, and the company is in the middle of raising another \$30 million.

It might not use speech recognition, but iNetNow is far from low tech.

Each of iNetNow's 50 "expert surfers" sits in a workstation with a networked computer that is attached to two, 21-inch displays. Surfers use a custom-built search engine to look up information on four Web sites at a time. Answers to commonly asked questions about topics such as weather or sports go into a knowledge database, so next time a caller inquires on that topic, the surfer can retrieve the information in seconds.

iNetNow's surf team is comprised mainly of young men and women who have recently moved to Los Angeles with dreams of acting, writing or directing, but don't mind making \$12 an hour while they wait to hit it big.

Jacob LaCivita was the company's first expert browser back in September 1999 and retains the title of "alpha surfer."

"Back then it was just me, the Net and a phone. I'd take calls from employees and investors" to see if it worked, said LaCivita, who has temporarily put plans to be a screenwriter on hold.

On a recent Monday afternoon in the company's mid-Wilshire headquarters, more than a dozen iNetNow surfers man the phones. Other shifts work through the evening and night.

In one cubicle, a surfer named Stephen helps a caller who wants to know when the Texas Rangers are playing next, who is pitching and where he can get tickets. With little trouble, Stephen finds the information on ESPN (<http://www.espn.com>), and the Ranger's Web site (<http://www.texasrangers.com>).

Sitting next to him is Neil Henderson, an aspiring actor and writer in his early 30s, who worked as a bartender before hiring on at iNetNow. Henderson takes a call from someone looking for the tracks on Madonna's new CD, which won't be released until September. While talking to the caller, Henderson simultaneously searches Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>), CDNow (<http://www.cdnow.com>), Ask Jeeves (<http://www.askjeeves.com>) and Google (<http://www.google.com>) but doesn't find the information. He tries Madonna's record company, Maverick (<http://www.wbr.com/maverick/>), also without luck. He checks a few more sites, and Gary, another surfer, pitches in, but the caller decides to hang up. The call lasts 3-1/2 minutes, well under iNetNow's five-minute limit.

When they're stumped, surfers continue looking anyway, ''and if I find it I'll call back," Henderson said. Sure enough, minutes later Henderson and Gary find a Madonna fan site and an online music news service that have the information, and Henderson passes the info on to the caller.

Beginning Sept. 1, iNetNow will charge \$4.95 a month for five calls, \$11.95 a month for 12 calls or \$21.95 a month for unlimited calls.

Eventually, Young wants to team up with a speech-recognition-based voice portal such as TellMe (<http://www.tellme.com>) or BeVocal (<http://www.bevocal.com>) that would offer iNetNow's expert surfers as a premium service.

Postal Service Testing E-Mail

The folks who deliver mail the old-fashioned way want to help you use the Internet to track that Mother's Day card - or simply e-mail it to Mom's house.

Worried that e-mail and online bill-paying could take a fatal bite out of first-class mail in coming years, the Postal Service is testing a variety of e-services for Americans, including one that would assign virtually everybody an e-mail address.

Customers could be notified by e-mail about an incoming bill or package, which they could then reroute to another street address.

Another service, set to begin a three-year consumer test next month, would allow customers to send e-mails to a post office to be printed and delivered as first-class mail - much like a service already provided by a private company.

A third program, already available, lets customers pay bills online through the Postal Service's Web site.

Benjamin Franklin, the nation's first postmaster, would be amazed.

Postal Service spokeswoman Sue Brennan called the e-projects ''a way for customers to choose how they want to get their correspondence."

The post office predicts that in 2003, first-class mail, now a \$35 billion business and its top revenue-producing service, will begin an unprecedented decline at the hands of booming e-mail and online billing services.

Under its own online bill system, the Postal Service charges customers \$6 per month to send 20 electronic transactions, or \$2 per month and 40 cents apiece for unlimited transactions.

The e-mail-to-paper system would cost about 41 cents per message - eight cents more than current 33-cent postage.

Under the e-mailbox proposal, virtually every American would be assigned a free e-mail address corresponding to their street address. Customers could simply link the service to any present e-mail address they have, or opt for a special online postal box. Customers could then get an e-mail address using their initials, followed by their nine-digit ZIP code and the last two numbers of their street address - with ''usps.com" tacked at the end.

For instance, Bill Clinton (1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C., 20500-0003) would get the e-mail address: bc20500000300(at)usps.com.

Not the sort of thing you'd rattle off at a cocktail party, but it's tough to replicate.

It's no news that Americans are avid e-mailers. A new study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that more than 90 million people have Internet access. Of those, about 84 million use e-mail regularly, while 16 million have used some sort of online banking service.

But followers of e-commerce had mixed reactions to the postal e-mail proposal.

"They're in catch-up mode," said Donald Heath, president of the nonprofit Internet Society, based in Reston, Va. "It sounds like they're not in touch with the reality of the Internet at this point."

Heath said most people who would use the service already have e-mail - and that the rest probably wouldn't log on for the tracking service.

"As schemes go, this one isn't bad," said Rob Enderle of Giga Information Group, a Santa Clara, Calif.-based technology research firm. "It absolutely makes sense - they are in the business of delivering mail, and e-mail is a form of mail. So ignoring that mode is a way of making yourself obsolete."

The Postal Service already waded into the brave new world of e-mail in 1998, when it began testing a kind of certified e-mail service called PostECS, which sends electronic receipts for contracts and other important documents transmitted over the Internet.

Last year, it rolled out its heralded online postage system. The Postal Service says 280,000 customers have printed \$22.6 million worth of "online stamps" since July 1999, but the service has yet to deliver a profit.

Gene Johnson, chief executive officer of Mail2000, a Bethesda, Md., company that translates e-mail messages into first-class mail, said customers would probably find little use for the Postal Service e-mail tracking system, but insisted that reports of the death of first-class mail are greatly exaggerated.

"We really don't see where it's going to disappear," he said. "Even our customers who want their messages delivered electronically, they want to see the hard copy."

Web Comedy Show To Become TV Series

In an example of how Internet companies and the entertainment industry may collaborate in the future, a short animated series on a Web site will become a half-hour, live-action show on a major cable network.

Showtime Networks Inc. has licensed "Starship Regulars," a comedy series on the Web site Icebox.com. The show, which will debut on the Web Aug. 11, will be turned into 13 live-action episodes for the cable network's 2001 season.

Icebox.com will become executive producer of the show and will receive a portion of the revenue generated by the program. The show's creator is Rob LaZebnick, one of Icebox.com's co-founders. LaZebnick serves as a co-producer of the Fox Television series "The Simpsons" and will also be co-producer of the Showtime version of "Starship Regulars."

Using the Web as an incubator for ideas that later become television shows or motion pictures is a strategy being pursued as an alternative to creating "destination" sites that showcase original programming. Many of the high-profile Web sites, such as the Digital Entertainment Network, Warner Bros.' Entertaindom and Pop.com, have either folded or retrenched after discovering that producing original programs solely for the Internet doesn't pay.

Instead, sites such as MediaTrip.com are forming close relationships with studios, which would rather spend thousands of dollars on inexpensive "Webisodes" in the hopes of finding a hit than millions on unsuccessful television pilots or films.

Unlike some Web sites, which solicit short films and animation from novices, Icebox.com from the start sought to sign established writers such as Larry David, who created "Seinfeld," and Jonathan Katz, who created "Dr Katz: Professional Therapist."

The Web site debuted in June and soon after was approached by executives from Showtime, who wanted to preview all the series Icebox.com had planned, according to Icebox.com chief executive Steve Stanford.

"Starship Regulars" is a comedy about rank-and-file crew members aboard a military spaceship. The Web version will consist of 15 three-minute episodes.

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